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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000081

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: LOCAL BAGHDAD RECONCILIATION EFFORTS GO BACK TO
TRIBAL ROOTS

Classified By: Classified by Acting PRT Leader Robert Ruch for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Local Baghdad contacts engaged in neighborhood-level reconciliation efforts suggest an approach based on tribal customs and religious leaders to resolve sectarian conflicts. The U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) coordinates an ongoing series of briefings with Baghdad residents for the PRT, the Embassy Political Section and the Embassy Legal Advisor. USIP arranged for PRT and EmbassyOffs met with two out-of-work but trained security guards from the Al-Furat neighborhood on 4 January: a Sunni named Jamal Rubaie and a Shi'a named Ali (LNU), who are fast friends and whose families attempt to resolve sectarian conflicts in their neighborhood. The group also met on 6 January with a young Shi'a Imam, Sheikh Ayad Jafar Al-Ouqabi of the Al Rasul Mosque in Baghdad's Zafariniya neighborhood and a member of the Karada District Advisory Council (DAC). The Sheikh described his outreach efforts to the Sunni Ali Al-Adem Mosque which he believes have led to better relations between Sunni and Shi'a in that part of Zafariniya. Sheikh Ayad espouses forming neighborhood-block committees with Sunni and Shi'a members charged with working out solutions to specific incidents of sectarian conflict at the grassroots level. END SUMMARY.

Respect for the "Big Guy"

¶2. (U) Ali, a Shi'a from Al-Furat in his early thirties, told the PRT and EmbassyOffs that people are unable to work or "go on with things as they are" because they are afraid of being kidnapped or killed. Sectarian tension in the neighborhood was due to rocket and mortar attacks, shootings and abductions perpetrated by insurgents and militia. Regular people, he pointed out, do not have a problem with one another if they are not spurred by sectarian violence. Ali's father-in-law is a Sunni tribal sheikh who works to deflect tensions in the neighborhood by bringing families together to resolve conflicts and seek compensation without retaliation. Ali stated that his father-in-law is respected as a sheikh and considered a "big guy" by his community, and therefore he has credibility when he urges restraint. Both Ali and his Sunni friend, Jamal, believe that "old men" are able to go into neighboring blocks or streets dominated by the opposite sect and engage that community's elders in dialogue in a way that younger men cannot do safely. Both asserted that tribal Sunni sheikhs can take advantage of past relationships or connections to their Shi'a counterparts, or vice versa, who can vouch for one another in order to broker solutions. They were hard-pressed, however, to cite specific examples of what such solutions might entail.

A Moderate Imam Reaches Out

13. (C) Sheikh Ayad Al-Ouqabi, a member of the now disbanded Baghdad City Council, described his outreach efforts to the Sunni Ali al Adem Mosque which have led to better relations between Sunni and Shi'a in that part of Zafariniya. He reached out to a cleric of the Sunni mosque and urged him to agree to allow residents of either sect to pray in whichever mosque was closer to their homes in order to decrease the risk of traveling back and forth. This agreement, and the result of Sunni and Shi'a praying together, began to build bridges between Sunni and Shi'a residents of Zafariniya. He also said that he helped organize residents of one block to establish civilian street checkpoints with both Sunni and Shi'a volunteers, and that they would only allow through people who were known by fellow residents. In one instance, a checkpoint alerted residents about seven vehicles carrying people who appeared poised to conduct an attack; residents quickly shared the information and monitored the vehicles until they left the neighborhood. Sheikh Ayad cites these efforts as examples of what can happen if people take a risk to work together. He claims that people are not fleeing from the neighborhood as they are from many other sections in Baghdad and that both Sunni and Shi'a who have fled other areas seek refuge there.

14. (C) Sheikh Ayad espouses forming neighborhood-block committees with Sunni and Shi'a members charged with working out solutions to specific incidents of sectarian conflict at the grassroots level. These committees would monitor the situation on their streets and try to deflect tensions

BAGHDAD 00000081 002 OF 002

between residents. They would also reach out to survivors and families of victims of terrorist attacks to make sure they feel cared for and to mitigate any desire for revenge. The committees would hear complaints from residents and attempt to work with neighboring committees to resolve differences and defuse tensions. The committees would be comprised of moderate clerics and tribal elders.

Coordinating Grassroots and Government

15. (C) The common themes of Sheikh Ayad's committees and the conflict resolution tactics espoused by Ali and Jamal are their reliance on religious and tribal leaders and the absence of government institutions. It is unclear, for example, how the neighborhood-block committees would work with the DACs or even the more local Neighborhood Advisory Councils (NACs), if they would at all. The DACs and NACs ideally function as a clearinghouse for residents to express concerns that ultimately reach the provincial government, and also as service providers that distribute cooking gas, water and other provisions supplied by the government to the residents. Sheikh Ayad is a DAC member himself, but he sees the council's role largely as essential service providers and its dealings with the Provincial Council as mostly project-related. Ali and Jamal suggested that average people either don't trust the DACs or don't understand their purpose, and are therefore more likely to take their problems to a sheikh or an imam.

Comment

16. (C) Ali and Jamal are unable to clearly articulate what specific solutions tribal sheikhs would be able to broker between aggrieved parties or how they would reach any agreement. Sheikh Ayad is much more thoughtful and lays out a clear structure, but he is similarly unable to explain how

local committees would interact with one another or what types of compromises they might reach. It is difficult to see what difference they might make throughout Baghdad but they could have a positive small-scale effect. The most telling aspect of both meetings was the strongly-held belief of all three that traditional methods of brokering solutions between tribal elders or religious leaders is the most likely to be successful method of resolving conflict in Baghdad.

KHALILZAD